UNITED NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/ICEF/1990/NGO/7
4 May 1990

ENGLISH ONLY

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1990 session

FOR INFORMATION

SIXTH ANNUAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION FORUM
19 and 20 APRIL 1990

Report to the UNICEF Executive Board

1. The Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Committee on UNICEF presents to the 1990 Executive Board the following summary of the issues and strategies raised at its sixth annual Forum, "Reaching the unreached", held on 19 and 20 April 1990 in New York. 1/ The Committee firmly believes that the recommendations contained herein will help the Board to face the challenges that arise from meeting the needs of the very poorest children, families and communities. These recommendations are proposals that have emerged from a series of groups and cannot be assumed to reflect the views of the Committee's membership as a whole nor, indeed, of all participants. Many of the discussions at the forum prefigured those that will be held at the World Summit for Children and are presented as a contribution of the international NGO community to Governments, NGOs and UNICEF as they prepare for the Summit.

2. Opening the forum, the President of the NGO Committee on UNICEF, said that it was shameful that current programme planning seemed from the outset to presume that the needs of the very poorest, the very hardest to reach, could not be met. The Executive Director of UNICEF, called attention to the pressing need to commit the best of resources - both human and material - to improving the well-being of all children. It was appropriate, he said, to focus on those children who had been overlooked or abandoned in recent years.

3. The two speakers who addressed the opening plenary meeting demonstrated how the inclusion of the extremely marginalized in the planning process would enable social, health, education and economic programmes to succeed. The Chairman of the Philippines National Council of Social Development detailed the experiences of her country in establishing collaborative efforts on behalf of street children among

nationals NGOs, local groups, government authorities and international agencies. The long-term success of the programmes was directly related to the initial involvement of the intended beneficiaries in setting programme goals.

4. The Vice-President of ATD Fourth World International, presented the Forum's background paper on goal setting 2/ and spoke of the views and experiences of people who had been left behind by the process of social and economic development. The moving statements of children and families who suffered from the effects of extreme poverty underlined the paper's useful demographic, anthropological and psychological criteria for identifying poor children and families from communities throughout the world.

5. Having established its basic theme, the Forum considered how best to use three major initiatives in meeting the problems of the unreached: the Convention on the Rights of the Child; education for all; and the international development strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade. Following presentations by distinguished authorities, several discussion groups addressed a variety of topics in order to identify issues and possible strategies.

6. Several issues emerged and re-emerged in many of the discussion groups, particularly the situation of girls and women, the single largest marginalized group throughout the world. Girls were seen as needing the protection provided by the Convention, particularly with reference to the exploitation of girls, including street girls and sexually exploited girls. Emphasis was given to the necessity of including girls in all forms of education and recognizing the paramount role women played in the education of their families. Young women needed to know about basic health care, family planning, the benefits of breast-feeding, prevention of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and the life-threatening hazards of female circumcision. It was recommended that more women be included in educational systems.

7. It was clear that successful efforts to reach the unreached with meaningful programmes required co-operation and collaboration between many elements of society. Governments and non-governmental groups must find effective areas of co-operation. Different services, such as education, health, rehabilitation, drug and AIDS-prevention programmes all needed trained personnel drawn from various social sectors. They also needed support from families, communities and the persons served. Alliances and networks were needed to bring together different groups.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

8. Vitit Muntarbhorn, Professor of Law at Chulalongkorn University, (Bangkok), described innovative projects, such as colourful games, that can be used to interest children, youth and adults in the potential impact of the Convention. He also discussed the challenges of implementation, stressing particularly the need to reach those who had power over the situation of children.

9. The Forum made the following recommendations concerning the Convention:

(a) Prompt ratification of the Convention would assist in the protection of children now outside the normal social welfare framework, and NGOs should continue to mobilize to encourage ratification by all countries;

(b) UNICEF and its NGO partners should work together to ensure local implementation and enforcement of the Convention, mobilizing children and their families in that effort wherever possible;

(c) UNICEF and NGOs should encourage dissemination of the principles of the Convention in the classrooms of the world;

(d) UNICEF should take the lead in identifying institutions and facilities needed to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the Convention.

Education for all

10. The Minister of Health of Nigeria emphasized the role of education in enabling people to function effectively in their own societies. He illustrated it with Nigerian experiences such as using native languages for instruction and involving women and other groups who were generally left out of the standard formal education system.

11. The Vice-President of the International Union of Students summarized the actions of the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, with reference to the significant role played by NGO representatives at the Conference. As an NGO member of the drafting committee for the World Declaration and Framework for Action adopted by the Conference, he pointed to the urgent need to follow up on the results of the Conference. The working groups also expressed support for the recommendations of the Conference for follow-up action.

12. The Forum made the following recommendations concerning the World Conference on Education for All:

(a) Means should be sought to implement the approach elaborated at the Conference;

(b) National priorities must be established to ensure quality education for all;

(c) Education, including the training of teachers, must be based on a consideration of all the needs of children, including health, nutrition and housing;

(d) Education must be seen as a continuing process, not as a finite event;

(e) A variety of approaches in national programmes will make it possible to cover now unreached groups. They would include formal and non-formal educational methods, vocational training, adult literacy and scheduling teaching to accommodate working children;

(f) Quality education required alliances among many sectors of society, including the Government, NGOs, businesses, cultural institutions and artists;

(g) NGOs should actively promote and advocate public policies to provide improved educational opportunities for all children.

Fourth United Nations Development Decade/Strategies for children

13. Professor Javier Iguiñiz, of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, critiqued the proposals for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade within the context of humanitarian goals.

14. Mr. Stephen Lewis, Special Representative for UNICEF, and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on African recovery and development, elaborating on UNICEF strategies for children in the 1990s, indicated that the initiatives considered by the Forum contained elements of hope. He pointed to the need to impress upon those persons and institutions with the power to change or maintain conditions the urgent need to see unreached children in their full context, including both the desperate economic position of many countries and the immediate constraints upon poor, marginalized or handicapped groups.

15. Groups discussing proposals for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade reiterated many of the issues considered previously, emphasizing education for girls, training of midwives and the contents of educational programmes such as nutrition, health, sanitation and water management.

16. The Forum recommended that:

(a) UNICEF and NGOs must emphasize the fundamental importance of the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 3/ and play full and constructive roles in preparation for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In that context UNICEF should fully brief its headquarters and field staff on issues of sustainable development, and should become even more the moral conscience of the development community, recognizing that environmental degradation is a major silent emergency;

(b) Increased resources must be made available for action research in nutrition and its dissemination to the local level.

Co-operation between UNICEF and NGOs

17. Regarding co-operation between UNICEF and NGOs, the forum made the following recommendations:

(a) UNICEF should systematically include the experiences of grass-roots organizations in its country situation analyses;

(b) An inventory of NGOs serving children should be updated regularly by UNICEF and innovative NGO projects and alliances should continue to be publicized;

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(c) UNICEF and Governments must establish more relevant indicators of children's exploitation and suffering so that NGOs can become more alert to and active on these issues and report their findings to UNICEF and the States Members of the United Nations. That would require the establishment of monitoring mechanisms and networks;

(d) UNICEF and Governments should support the development of solid institutional structures at the local NGO level, so that small and grass-roots NGOs could become more capable of absorbing new resources and responsibilities;

(e) UNICEF should facilitate the tasks of NGOs by encouraging government support for reaching the unreached;

(f) NGOs should ask their members to collaborate with the respective governmental authorities in the preparations for the World Summit for Children and should also prepare input at the country level during the coming weeks and months.

World Summit for Children

18. The NGO Committee wished to draw attention to the many activities and events already planned to stimulate widespread reflection on the issues that would be before the heads of State and Government at the World Summit for Children. In particular, the chief executive officers of major humanitarian and development NGOs would meet to review the global agenda for children. Young people from around the world were calling their own series of "summits". Children's movements were exploring ways of ensuring that young voices were heard at the Summit, while just two weeks before the Summit, some 1,000 NGOs would discuss issues affecting children and development at a major conference sponsored by the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat.

19. Within the context of the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, the following specific recommendations were addressed to the heads of State and Government who would participate at the Summit:

(a) Endorsing the "first call for children" approach, which meant a commitment to providing more resources for children, women and girls;

(b) Listening at the Summit itself to the voices of children and of NGOs, including grass-root organizations;

(c) Making social reform a priority, with human resource development to be financed while economic and structural reforms were in process;

(d) Reiterating and reinforcing the primary health care approach;

(e) Agreeing to urgent reductions in military expenditures, recognizing that military aggression was first and foremost harmful to children;

(f) Asking debt negotiators to include specific debt-relief targets related to children.

Conclusion

20. The closing session of the Forum was addressed by Dr. Jean Mayer, President of Tufts University (United States of America). Speaking from his perspective as a long-time consultant to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and UNICEF and as a member of the United States Presidential Commission on World Hunger, he presented an urgent case for sharing the "peace dividend" with children in developing countries. Continued commitment would be required not only from traditional donors, but also from Governments of developing countries that currently spent up to 50 per cent of their gross national product on defence.

21. The NGO Committee on UNICEF, with a diverse global membership, wished to thank all those who took part in the NGO forum and contributed to its lively and fruitful discussions. In particular, it wished to highlight the important participation of members of the UNICEF Executive Board and of the UNICEF programme staff - a dialogue that would make the grand alliance for children even more productive.

Notes

1/ The 1990 NGO forum was developed in response to Executive Board resolution 1989/8, "Reaching the poorest".

2/ "Reaching the poorest", ATD Fourth World International working document on how to reach those left out.

3/ A/42/427.